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A Patrician for the C.I.A.

The story of Allen Dulles, a scion of the establishment who became

GENTLEMAN SPY

The Life of Allen Dulles.

By Peter Grose.

Illustrated. 641 pp. Boston:

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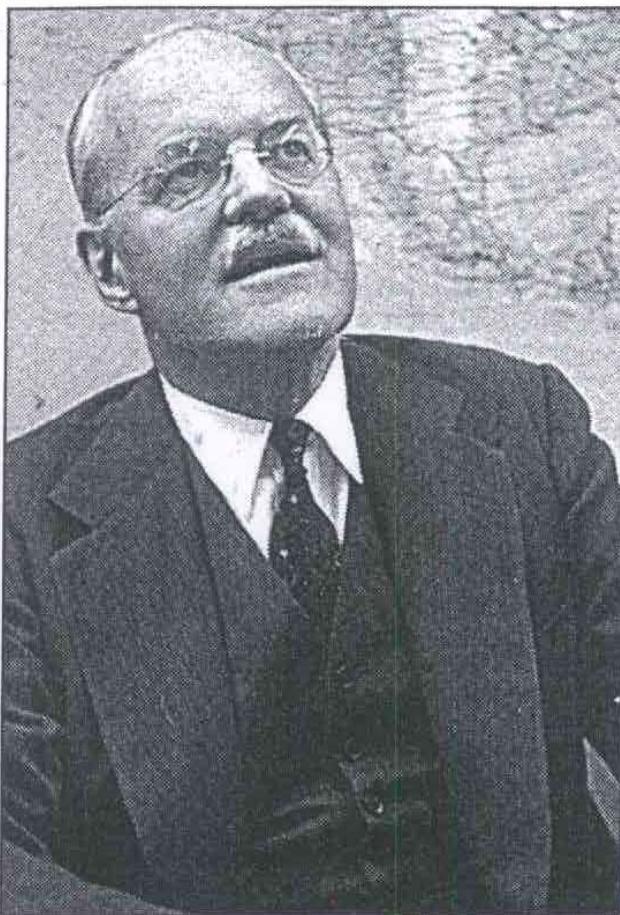
By David Wise

MORE than any other American, Allen Dulles embodied and came to symbolize the Central Intelligence Agency, which he headed for more than eight years (1953-61) during the height of the cold war. Dulles was a scion of the establishment, the son of a Presbyterian minister, a successful Wall Street lawyer and a diplomat long before he became a spy. He was also a perfect reflection of the era's split American psyche, which cloaked — the word is not idly chosen — itself in the highest moral precepts as the champion of freedom and liberty for all, while at the same time condoning whatever covert operations were deemed necessary to advance American interests, from overthrowing other governments to just a little bit of assassination. As long as everything was "plausibly deniable" — that is, as long as Washington could lie about it to its own people and the rest of the world.

Dulles's life is an incredible story, so it is all the more remarkable that in the 25 years since his death at the age of 75 in 1969, there has been until now no full-length study of the man. But with "Gentleman Spy," Peter Grose has produced a superb biography, full of surprises and all sorts of new information. Mr. Grose, a former foreign correspondent for The New York Times and a former executive editor of Foreign Affairs, has given us not only Dulles's life but, in the process, a panorama of our times, from Versailles to the downfall of the Third Reich, from the onset of the cold war to the Bay of Pigs. His timing is serendipitous; the agency that Dulles built is in deep trouble, its role and budgets under scrutiny in the wake of the end of the cold war and counterintelligence disasters.

Dulles, as "Gentleman Spy" makes clear, had a secret weapon that was not produced in the laboratories of the C.I.A. He was a man of enormous, almost irresistible charm. As Mr. Grose writes: "From an early age he set out to make people like him. Affability, he discovered, was a most useful character trait."

In the interests of full disclosure, I should say up front that I was not immune to the charm. In researching my own books, I had a number of conversations with Dulles, in the garden of his Q Street home in Georgetown and in his modest office in Foggy Bottom (he never moved into the modern, if sterile, C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va., that was his creation and dream). I found him remarkably informative and always delightful, not least for the fact that he remained



GEORGE TAMES/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, in his office in 1957.

America's head spy.

cordial and accessible even though he knew we disagreed on the dangers posed by a secret intelligence agency in a democracy.

But beneath the charm, the avuncular twinkle in the eyes and the unfailingly friendly manner, as Mr. Grose documents, was a man who could and did manipulate others to achieve his objectives. The people he used included those closest to him: he was cruel to his wife and often indifferent to his children.

His marriage to Clover Todd was not a happy one, although they remained together, with affection, to the end of his life. He had a wandering eye, and there was an astonishing succession of Other Women. Once, Mr. Grose implies, Dulles enjoyed the charms of Queen Frederika of Greece in the dressing room next to his C.I.A. office. When the door accidentally locked behind them, the embarrassed spymaster and Her Royal Highness had to be let out by a C.I.A. aide. Besides the Queen, there was Mary Bancroft, one of his early

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agents in wartime Switzerland (Clover knew, but became her close friend anyhow); Toscanini's daughter, and even, apparently, Clare Boothe Luce. His covert operations were not confined to the C.I.A.

But if he lived by his own rules, Dulles was also single-minded in his pursuit of what he perceived as the interests of his country. He did not, it would appear, ever question the righteousness of his course, or stop to wonder if a secret government might ultimately defeat the purposes of the Constitution and undermine the very system he was trying to protect and defend. The minister's son was anointed from the start with a sure sense of his own moral mission, and a deeply rooted belief that the ends justified the means. Especially if the means were fun.

And what great fun he had! The best was as spymaster in Switzerland for the Office of Strategic Services from 1942 to 1945, scheming with considerable success against the Nazis. From his lair at Herren-gasse 23 in Bern, operating under the code number 110, Dulles penetrated the Third Reich, building a remarkable network of spies inside Hitler's Germany. There was Gero von Schulze-Gaevernitz, his first conduit into the Nazi regime; Hans Bernd Gisevius, a 6-foot-4 Prussian snob known as Tiny; and above all the inestimable Fritz Kolbe, a gray Nazi bureaucrat who turned over 1,600 documents to Dulles. Mr. Grose makes the spies who march through these pages come alive.

Dulles knew of the plot by anti-Nazi elements in Germany to kill Hitler. Its failure broke up his spy network; his best sources had to flee the Gestapo. Then, in Operation Sunrise, Dulles met secretly with Gen. Karl Wolff of the SS and arranged the surrender of the German armies in Italy just before the end of the war in Europe. During the negotiations in Ascona, Switzerland, Dulles sent his wife out in a rowboat on Lake Maggiore so the men could talk undisturbed, then summoned her back to make lunch for the Germans.

Dulles was ambitious. The grandson of one Secretary of State, John Watson Foster, and the nephew of another, Robert Lansing, he wanted to be Secretary of State. But his sourpuss brother, John Foster Dulles, in whose shadow he labored for most of his life, achieved that instead. It is Foster for whom the airport is named, not Allen.

The brothers grew up in Watertown, N.Y., and in nearby Henderson Harbor, the Kennedy-esque compound on the shores of Lake Ontario. Allen, the younger of the brothers, made Phi Beta Kappa at Princeton; after a year teaching in India, he joined the diplomatic service and was posted to Vienna in time for the funeral of Emperor Franz Josef. In Bern in 1917, he turned down a Bolshevik revolutionary's request for a meeting and went off to play tennis instead — thereby passing up a chance to meet Lenin, but gaining a great after-dinner story. At Versailles, he was an assistant to his Uncle Bert, Secretary of State Lansing. Dulles helped to draw the map of the new nation of Czechoslovakia, which he later described as "a banana lying across the face of Europe." He served in Berlin and Istanbul, and in 1922, at age 29, was called home to head the State Department's Near East division. Then he joined Sullivan & Cromwell, his brother's Wall Street law firm, made partner and practiced for 15 years. Assigned to Paris, he was too busy to return for his father's funeral.

Some of the law firm's biggest prewar clients were German bankers and industrialists, an awkward fact that was later to cause criticism of both Dulles brothers. Allen Dulles met both Hitler and Mussolini during those years; if he did not immediately see Hitler as a threat to peace, he did. Mr. Grose informs us, help Jewish bankers and other wealthy Jewish clients escape from Nazi Germany. And it was Allen, over Foster's objections, who persuaded Sullivan & Cromwell to shut down its Berlin office as "morally objectionable."

BETWEEN them, the Dulles brothers ran the cold war. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower named Foster Secretary of State and Allen Director of Central Intelligence. Allen supervised the C.I.A.'s overthrow of the Government of Iran in 1953 and the Government of Guatemala in 1954; he also oversaw the failed effort to topple Sukarno in Indonesia in 1958. He presided over the C.I.A. during the plot to assassinate Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and the first attempts to use the Mafia to murder Fidel Castro in Cuba. (Mr. Grose maintains that Dulles called off the Mafia, but the record is by no means clear that he did so.) He initiated the U-2 spy plane program, a C.I.A. success and then a disaster when one of the planes was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960. Dulles survived into the Kennedy Administration, but after the Bay of Pigs John F. Kennedy decided he had to go.

Among the many marvelous anecdotes that Mr. Grose relates, in lucid and entertaining style, there is one that perhaps best sums up the contradictions of Dulles's life. On a visit to the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, Dulles brought chocolate Easter bunnies for the children of the C.I.A. station chief. He then persuaded Batista to create a special police agency to root out Communists. Lord knows how many Cubans had their fingernails pulled out as a result of the visit of the kindly gentleman with the chocolate rabbits.

And yet, his infidelities aside, Dulles was in many respects a good man, and indeed, as the title of this book suggests, a gentleman. How, then, could he do the terrible things that he did — the drug tests on unsuspecting Americans, the assassination plots, the covert manipulation of other countries? One wishes that "Gentleman Spy" had examined the question, but it is barely visible.

Perhaps the answer is that Dulles was, at least in part, what we, or our leaders, wanted. Presidents and Congress, and presumably the public, preferred to have it both ways: as a nation we could embrace morality, while the minister's son did the dirty work in the rooms upstairs. Dulles was a willing instrument of national policy. As Mr. Grose says, "He always claimed that his

duty was only that of a professional intelligence officer, leaving the policy making to others — to his brother." That was not the whole story, of course. Mr. Grose also notes that many of the C.I.A. operations under Allen Dulles determined policy.

In the end he grew weary. Not long before Dulles's death, an eager young C.I.A. recruit called on the great man at his home, hoping for inspiration. He did not find it. "Oh," Dulles said, "perhaps we have already intervened too much in the affairs of other peoples." □

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